

THE CREATIVE POWER OF LISTENING WHICH LEADS TO DIALOGUE

Crusana (Colombia): *“Dearest Chiara, you are truly a teacher of inculturation also in the particular aspect of making ourselves one, in silence and deep listening to the other. Can you tell us your experience about this?”*

Chiara Lubich: This is my experience: ... Gandhi’s grandson, whom I met in Switzerland, told me: “... the way is ‘to listen’. Perhaps he also said it for this reason: there is such a wealth beneath, such a contrast, that you must know about, before uttering a word. I remembered this. In Coimbatore, ... my talk began like this: “I have come to India to listen, so here I am. But you have asked me to speak so I will speak, then there will be time ... Anyway, I have 18 days in which to listen.” So, we should always have this attitude.

I have seen over and over again that it is an amazing help for all the dialogues, just going so as to listen; because first of all you inculturate yourself, you enter the other person’s culture, you understand it; you enter into the other person’s language: they speak in this way and that way. Like Jesus who spoke in parables. He spoke about the vine and the branches, and about flowers, the lilies of the field, because this was the culture of that place. Hence, they understood him.

So, by listening and listening I felt ... that without even trying, I was inculturating myself, I was entering into and understanding their language. I also understood ... They had prepared some written information for me so that I could learn more; but more than that I understood their proverbs. There's one proverb, for example, that I think is really special. It's a proverb about loving our enemies, which is typically Christian. But they have adopted it too. I don't know if they took it from us or if it came from the Holy Spirit. But I know that they have this saying.

There is another proverb about a perfumed wood, sandalwood and the saying goes: the axe cuts the sandalwood and the sandalwood takes revenge by leaving its perfume on the axe. It's the revenge of love, it means loving enemies. So, by listening you understand, and afterwards when you speak, you refer to that language or those proverbs, those topics you learned about, in order to say what you want to say.

Listening has another advantage. I listened for hours, and the advantage of listening is that after you've listened, they feel obliged to listen to you, even only out of politeness, because it's logical. They say: “What about you? What can you say?” So, you speak, “Well, I really came to India to listen.” “Yes, but what about your spirituality, your spiritual life? You are a guru. What kind of guru are you?” Then you explain your guru, see? This is just to say. But this applies to all dialogues: interreligious dialogue, ecumenical dialogue because we don't know the other churches, and also among Catholics because we don't know the other institutions, other Movements and other realities. We know the world in which we live. This is what you need to do.